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Message Text

SECRET

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73
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE
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S E C R E T BOGOTA 1881

EXDIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (KISSINGER, HENRY A.)
SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S VISIT TO BOGOTA

REF: SECTO 4087 FROM BRASILIA

1. STUDENT DISTURBANCES IN BOGOTA FEBRUARY 20 WERE IN PART RELATED TO SECRETARY'S VISIT, BUT ALSO COINCIDED WITH AND WERE IN SUPPORT OF BANK WORKERS STRIKE AND RESULTING DISORDERS. THIS SITUATION IS NORMAL AT THIS TIME OF YEAR WHEN SCHOOLS REOPEN IN BOGOTA AND LABOR DISPUTES PROLIFERATE DUE TO EXPIRATION OF LABOR CONTRACTS. UNIVERSITY ISSUES, AS USUAL, RANGE FROM STUDENT-FACULTY GRIEVANCES OVER CLASS SIZES, CAFETERIAS, SALARIES, TO SOLIDARITY WITH STRIKERS. SECRETARY'S VISIT PROVIDES ADDED GRIST FOR THE MILL BUT DISTURBANCES WOULD HAVE OCCURRED WITHOUT VISIT AND SOME OTHER ISSUE WOULD HAVE SERVED AS WELL.

2. UNIVERSITY SITUATION IN BOGOTA HAS BEEN QUIET DURING RECENT MONTHS AS SCHOOLS WERE IN RECESS. LAST UNIVERSITY-CONNECTED VIOLENCE WAS LAST FALL, WHEN STUDENTS DESTROYED PAPAL NUNCIO'S CAR AND HANDLED NUNCIO ROUGHTLY.

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3. DISTURBANCES ON FEBRUARY 20 IN MEDELLIN, 500 MILES

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FROM BOGOTA, IS LATEST EPISODE IN A DISPUTE BETWEEN STUDENTS AND FACULTY, AND A TOUGH DEPARTMENTAL GOVERNOR, WHICH DATES FROM NOVEMBER 1975. THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL CLASHES IN MEDELLIN SINCE THEN BETWEEN SECURITY FORCES AND STUDENTS, AND TROOPS HAVE BEEN PATROLLING THE STREETS FOR WEEKS. THE BURNING OF A US FLAG (IN MEDELLIN) TO PROTEST THE SECRETARY'S VISIT WAS AN ISOLATED, UNRELATED INCIDENT.

3. GOC REACTION TO THESE AND PREVIOUS DISORDERS IS AND HAS BEEN CALM AND FIRM, DESIGNED MAINLY TO KEEP VIOLENT DEMONSTRATORS WITIN BOUNDS AND TO AVOID CREATING MARTYRS. SECURITY FORCES HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ACCOMPLISHING THIS. FOR THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT, PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS ISSUED SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS TO SECURITY FORCES TO CONTAIN DEMONSTRATIONS AND GOC PREPARATIONS ARE THOROUGH AND EXTENSIVE.

4. ONLY RECENT BOGOTA BOX SCORE IS THAT OF FEBRUARY 20 DISTURBANCES IN WHICH ONE ARMY COLONEL WAS INJURED, TWO OTHER OFFICERS HURT, TWO VEHICLES BURNED, A NUMBER STONED, AND 15 STUDENTS ARRESTED. REACTION OF SECURITY FORCES WILL PROBABLY BE TOUGHER NOW BECAUSE OF THE INJURED COLONEL.

5. COLOMBIAN UNIVERSITIES TRADITIONALLY HAVE BEEN POLITICALLY VOLATILE. CAMPUS TROUBLES ARE A NORMAL FEATURE OF COLOMBIAN LIFE AND HAVE NO SPECIAL POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE. YESTERDAY'S DISTRUBANCES, DESPITE BOX SCORE, HAVE NOT CREATED EITHER ALARM OR POLITICAL PROBLEM. BECAUSE COLOMBIA IS OPEN SOCIETY AND GOC DOES NOT WISH BE REPRESSIVE, SECURITY FORCES TRADITIONALLY DO NOT TRY TO PREVENT A DEMONSTRATION BUT RATHER TO CONTAIN IT AND KEEP IT FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND, INTERVENING WHEN PROPERTY IS DESTROYED. (THOUGH FOR VISIT THEY WILL SEEK TO PREVENT AND BREAK UP ANY GROUP IN VICINITY BEFORE IT GETS GOING.)
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